

Interim Guidance – VDH Recommendations for Community Mitigation Measures for COVID-19

Purpose:

This dashboard is intended to help communities measure the extent to which the COVID-19 virus is spreading in their localities, and guide possible responses to mitigate that spread. Mitigation measures may include restrictions from Phase 1 or 2 of Virginia’s Forward Virginia plan, but such restrictions may be considered individually – mitigation does not require adopting all restrictions from a particular phase. Mitigation options should be based on extent and source of community transmission and community characteristics. Each community is unique and appropriate mitigation strategies should consider the impact to the community and be based on the best available data. Decisions will vary on how and when to increase community mitigation and the following information is intended to guide decisions.

Community mitigation activities are actions that people and communities can take to slow the spread of a new virus with pandemic potential, such as the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes COVID-19. Each community is unique and appropriate mitigation strategies should consider the impact to the community and be based on the best available data. Examples of community mitigation measures are strategies such as stay-at-home orders, face coverings, and physical distancing, which can be achieved partially through executive actions such as business closures, gathering limitations, and occupancy limits on some settings (e.g., restaurants, non-essential retail establishments). Decisions will vary on how and when to increase community mitigation and the following information is intended to guide decisions, not dictate decisions.

Building upon the Forward Virginia “[Key Measures](#),” VDH has established pandemic metrics (**Table 1**) that will be utilized to evaluate both disease burden and disease trends. Trend evaluates whether a measure is increasing, fluctuating, or decreasing. Burden establishes a threshold or “flag” for each metric and demonstrates whether or not the metric has exceeded that threshold of concern. VDH has also established criteria levels (e.g., major, minor) for each of the metrics. Based on the composite score calculated, levels of transmission are assigned at the regional level. While these metrics can be considered individually, the combination of flags for each metric indicates the larger level of concern for a community (e.g. region or state). A high level of transmission will necessitate more case investigation, contact tracing, and testing. Communities should consider their capacity in these areas in determining whether additional community mitigation actions are necessary. Other community characteristics, as well as public health and healthcare system capacity, will also drive decision-making. Please note, in discussions with stakeholders, that these metrics are likely based on exposures that happened two or more weeks ago, and that any interventions will not provide immediate changes to data trends. The metrics below may be used to inform the level of mitigation needed. For more information regarding metrics and methods, please refer to the [Pandemic Metrics Dashboard Technical Notes](#) and Pandemic Metrics Talking Points.

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Table 1. Metrics Identified, Thresholds, and Criteria Level (from Pandemic Metrics Technical Notes)

Metric Description	Trend Threshold	Burden Threshold	Criteria Level	Geographic Granularity
Number of daily new cases (by report date)	14 consecutive days increase or decrease	5/10 cases per 100,000 residents (7-day MA)	Major	State, Region, Locality
Test percent positivity by lab report date, PCR only	14 consecutive days increase or decrease	10% +	Minor	State, Region, Locality
Percent of hospital beds occupied	14 consecutive days increase or decrease	90% hospital beds occupied	Minor	State, Region
Number of hospitals reporting difficulty acquiring PPE in next 72 hours	7 consecutive days increase or decrease	1 or more hospitals reporting difficulty per region within 7-day period	Minor	State, Region
Percent of new cases reported in healthcare workers	7 consecutive days increase or decrease	5.0% of cases among HCW (7-day MA)	None	State, Region, Locality
Number of current ICU hospitalizations	14 consecutive days increase or decrease	3.5 ICU hospitalizations per 100,000	Minor	State, Region
COVID-like illness (CLI) emergency department visits	14 consecutive days increase or decrease	4.0 CLI visits per 100,000 population (7-day MA)	Minor	State, Region
Number of new confirmed outbreak(s) reported in last 2 weeks	14 consecutive days increase or decrease	0.04/0.06 outbreaks per 100,000 residents (7-day MA)	Minor	State, Region, Locality

VDH Recommendations for Community Mitigation Measures:

Purpose/Scope: This document is intended to provide guidance on the implementation of community mitigation actions, which are most successful when combined with other aspects of the pandemic response--containment (case investigation/contact tracing), communications, and testing. Although some high level information on these other components is presented, **this document does not provide a review of all aspects of the response, but rather focuses on consideration and implementation of community mitigation strategies.**

Local Health Districts will be collaborating and communicating with the Regional Containment Support Centers, Regional Testing Liaisons, Regional Public Information Officers (PIOs), and Central Office Community Mitigation Coordinators. The local and regional teams will be formulating action plans based on local and regional data and context. Regional Teams will consider local transmission, outbreak data and

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qualitative information to understand which populations/settings may be driving transmission and whether specific interventions are needed. The Central Office Community Mitigation coordinators will partner with regional teams/representatives working on containment, communication, and testing strategies. These multi-disciplinary regional teams will communicate progress and needs to the Central Office Pandemic Rapid Response/Coordination Team accordingly.

Background: As the COVID-19 pandemic evolves, the extent of community transmission is likely to change and different regions of the Commonwealth are likely to experience different levels at different times. To date, [Key Measures](#) that monitor case trends, testing, and hospital measures have been used as gating criteria to determine when to move forward to the next phase of reopening, gradually relaxing community restrictions in place to mitigate disease spread. To complement the Key Measures, VDH has developed a [Pandemic Metrics Dashboard](#) to assess the extent of community transmission at the regional level. This document provides guidance as to what recommended community mitigation actions should be considered based on the extent of transmission in a community or region.

As the pandemic continues, Virginia must anticipate and monitor for increases in cases and outbreaks, and needs to be prepared to implement stricter community mitigation measures as they become warranted. Although restrictive community mitigation strategies are viewed as a last resort, they are an important tool to employ if other approaches are not sufficient in controlling disease spread.

Disease prevention and control necessitates a combination of individual and population (or community) level interventions. Individuals need to follow [healthy hygiene](#) practices, [stay at home when sick](#), practice [physical distancing](#), use a [cloth face covering \(with some exceptions\)](#), and follow [isolation](#) and [quarantine](#) recommendations to lower the risk of disease spread. These actions are appropriate regardless of the extent of community-level mitigation needed.

Recommendations and Considerations for Implementing Community Mitigation:

At this time, VDH recommends that communities experiencing low transmission should maintain Forward Virginia Phase 3 mitigation strategies as a baseline. VDH recommends that regions experiencing moderate to substantial transmission consider and potentially apply additional mitigation strategies at the regional level. Depending on the level of transmission and populations impacted, select strategies from prior Forward Virginia phases can be considered. Localities within a region that are less impacted than others could potentially be excluded if data strongly support that. If a single locality is experiencing moderate to substantial transmission, increased mitigation can be considered but some strategies (e.g. business closures) may be more challenging to implement at the local level. When 3 or more regions are experiencing moderate or substantial transmission, mitigation strategies at a statewide level could be considered.

To complement actions taken by individuals, VDH recommends health districts work with local government officials and other stakeholders to consider community mitigation measures implemented in prior Forward Virginia Phases, depending on the extent of transmission a community

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is experiencing. For example, community mitigation measures to *enhance* physical distancing may need to be implemented again if data are indicating the healthcare system may soon become overwhelmed with an influx of patients. When the data from the Pandemic Metrics Dashboard indicate an increase in the extent of community transmission at a regional or state level, stricter mitigation measures (e.g. Phase regression or select mitigation strategies from prior Phases) should be considered after a review of complementary data sources and an understanding of local circumstances. The focus of community mitigation is on reducing transmission by reducing person-to-person transmission with the goal of decreasing the burden on the healthcare system while building/enhancing containment via testing and tracing capacity. The narrative below summarizes which mitigation strategies should be considered at different levels of transmission. Additional information is also briefly discussed regarding testing and containment approaches, and recommendations for public messaging. A graphic summarizing the strategy for responding to changes in extent of community transmission (including communications, community mitigation, testing, and containment) can be found in the attachments.

Public Messaging for All Levels of Community Transmission:

- Increased messaging on risk of serious disease for individuals of all age groups with high-risk medical conditions and recommend “safer at home.”
- Follow healthy hygiene practices, stay at home when sick, practice physical distancing, and follow isolation and quarantine recommendations.
- Wear a face covering while in public places and when around other individuals not part of your household (compliance with EO 63).
- Reduce public interactions and activities.
- Limit social gatherings according to Phase Guidance, especially indoors, and follow recommendations for physical distancing.
- Avoid crowded indoor spaces, such as bars or nightclubs.
- Use take-out or outdoor dining. Use indoor dining if strict social distancing can be maintained.
- Protect high-risk individuals by avoiding public events, wearing face coverings in public, and increasing personal hygiene.
- Encourage telework where feasible.

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Community Mitigation Recommendations for Localities/Regions Approaching or Experiencing SUBSTANTIAL Community Transmission

If Locality/Region is APPROACHING SUBSTANTIAL Community Transmission, *planning* for the following mitigation strategies should begin. If Locality/Region is AT SUBSTANTIAL Community Transmission, the following community mitigation strategies should be strongly considered for immediate implementation if not already in place.

Local Health Department

- To complement containment and testing strategies, consider the pandemic data and local context.
- Collaborate with the VDH Central Office Mitigation Team to explore local transmission/outbreak and qualitative information to **understand which populations/settings may be driving transmission** and whether specific interventions are needed, including communication strategies or increased enforcement/education. Examples include:
 - Targeting young people with messages about face coverings using relevant social media.
 - Targeted education regarding safe workplace practices.
 - Working with K-12 schools and institutions of higher education to develop improved mitigation plans.
 - Increased outreach to faith-based organizations to encourage social distancing recommendations.
 - Working with faith leaders/local celebrities to encourage use of face coverings.
- **Formulate mitigation recommendations** and discuss with local elected officials and stakeholders. If multiple health districts in a region are experiencing moderate or substantial transmission, health directors should convene as a region to discuss data and formulate collective recommendations to the extent possible.
- Health directors should **meet with local officials** and other stakeholders (including long-term care facilities, institutions of higher education, K-12 schools, correctional facilities, etc.) to discuss levels of transmission in the community, and **discuss proposed recommendations for which interventions** are needed (public messaging, business community restrictions, increased testing, recommendations for school settings, etc.).
- For decision making related to K12 programming, please review the “CDC School Metrics” tab on the Pandemic Metrics Dashboard and the VDH Interim Guidance on Mitigation Measures in K12 Settings.

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ACTIONS FOR SUBSTANTIAL COMMUNITY TRANSMISSION	
Communications	<p>In addition to actions listed for “Public Messaging for All Levels of Community Transmission” implement the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement strategic outreach and messaging campaigns to targeted groups identified by the investigation team. • Work with regional PIOs to identify appropriate media outlets, prominent community leaders to assist with amplifying messages.
Community Mitigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Localities/regions experiencing substantial transmission should consider select strategies previously implemented in Forward Virginia Phase 1 or Phase 2 (see appendix for summary) as determined by local data/context, which could include the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ensure businesses are enforcing policies for use of face coverings, physical distancing, and hygiene procedures as described in relevant Phase Guidelines for Business Sectors. ○ If not already required, encourage individuals to wear a face covering when in public places and around individuals not part of your household ○ Limit social gatherings to no more than 10 individuals ○ Focus on closing areas and/or limiting occupancy where people congregate or settings that include high-risk activities (bars, indoor fitness centers/gyms, etc.) ○ Limit food establishments to take out/delivery or dine outdoors while socially distanced ○ Encourage telework whenever feasible.
Containment (Investigation/Contact Tracing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to ensure all cases are contacted and contacts are appropriately advised/tested.
Testing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase community neighborhood testing and work with local community groups to increase access to testing to the extent possible. • Surge testing, case investigation, and contact tracing resources to neighborhoods and zip codes with highest case rates.

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Recommendations for Localities/Regions Experiencing AT MODERATE or APPROACHING MODERATE Community Transmission

If Locality/Region is AT MODERATE Community Transmission, the following mitigation strategies should be strongly considered for immediate implementation if not already in place. If Locality/Region is APPROACHING MODERATE Community Transmission, planning for the following mitigation strategies should occur.

Local Health Department

- Collaborate with the Central Office Mitigation Team to explore local transmission/outbreak and qualitative information to **understand which populations/settings may be driving transmission** and whether specific interventions are needed, including communication strategies or increased enforcement/education. Examples include:
 - Increased outreach to faith-based organizations to encourage social distancing recommendations.
 - Working with faith leaders/local celebrities to encourage use of face coverings.
 - Targeting young people with messages about face coverings using relevant social media.
 - Targeted education regarding safe workplace practices.
 - Working with K-12 schools and institutions of higher education to develop improved mitigation plans.
- **Formulate mitigation recommendations** and discuss with local elected officials and stakeholders. If multiple health districts in a region are experiencing moderate or substantial transmission, health directors should convene as a region to discuss data and formulate collective recommendations to the extent possible.
- Health directors should **meet with local officials** and other stakeholders (including long-term care facilities, institutions of higher education, K-12 schools, correctional facilities, etc.) to discuss levels of transmission in the community, and **discuss proposed recommendations for which interventions** are needed (public messaging, business community restrictions, increased testing, recommendations for school settings, etc.).

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ACTIONS FOR MODERATE COMMUNITY TRANSMISSION	
Communications	<p>In addition to actions listed for “Public Messaging for All Levels of Community Transmission” implement the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement strategic outreach and messaging campaigns to targeted groups identified by the investigation team. • Work with regional PIOs to identify appropriate media outlets, prominent community leaders to assist with amplifying messages.
Community Mitigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Localities/regions experiencing moderate transmission should consider select strategies such as those previously implemented in Forward Virginia Phase 2 as determined by local data and context. Examples of mitigation strategies include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Ensure businesses are enforcing policies for use of face coverings, physical distancing, and hygiene procedures such as those described in Phase 2 Guidelines for Business Sectors o Limit social gatherings to 50 individuals or fewer o Limit fitness centers/gyms to 30% occupancy • Consider limiting occupancy of bar areas to 50% capacity/restricting alcohol sales until data improves; encourage outdoor dining areas together with local government officials • Work with local businesses to encourage compliance with EO63 (face coverings) and other relevant executive orders (e.g. EO65) pertaining to the business sector.
Containment (Investigation/Contact Tracing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to ensure all cases are contacted and contacts are appropriately advised/tested.
Testing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase community neighborhood testing and work with local community groups to increase access to testing to the extent possible. • Surge testing, case investigation, and contact tracing resources to neighborhoods and zip codes with highest case rates.

Recommendations for Localities/Regions Experiencing LOW Community Transmission:

Local Health Department- Community Mitigation Considerations

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- Health directors should continue to meet and communicate with their respective local officials to discuss levels of transmission in the community, and discuss proposed recommendations for which interventions are needed (public messaging, business community restrictions, increased testing, recommendations for school settings, etc.).
- Consider upcoming events that could impact transmission (e.g. K-12 schools and colleges opening or closing, holidays, elections, large events, tourism).
- Continue to **communicate and enforce community mitigation strategies** detailed in the [Phase 3 Guidance for Business Sectors](#).
- Continue to **promote public health messaging** regarding COVID-19 mitigation.

Recommendations for Localities/Regions Experiencing MINIMAL Community Transmission:

As the COVID-19 pandemic evolves, there may be a time when universal mitigation strategies (e.g. wearing cloth face coverings) may be relaxed; however, it is unclear at this time what that threshold may be. VDH advises communities to maintain strategies outlined in the “LOW” transmission category until further notice.

Other considerations:

Examples above are not intended to be exhaustive recommendations for a given level of community transmission. This document does not contemplate mitigation approaches for K12 schools, Child Care or Higher Education that are handled in other guidance documents. VDH recommends that K12 school dismissals or closures be handled at the most local level possible, considering local epidemiology, community characteristics, and local capacity. Local health departments are encouraged to work with school leaders to make decisions about schools based on the VDH Interim Guidance for Mitigation Measures in School Settings and the [CDC School Metrics tab](#) of the Pandemic Metrics Dashboard. If multiple regions are experiencing substantial transmission, more widespread school closures may be warranted (similar to the action taken in March 2020).

This document does not contemplate mitigation strategies that may be needed in unique settings such as migrant labor camps or poultry plants. It also does not address mitigation strategies that may be implemented in the health care sector, such as those implemented in nursing homes or health systems; for example, temporarily postponing elective procedures to preserve PPE or prevent overwhelming the healthcare system.

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References:

White House Opening Up America Again: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/openingamerica/>

CDC Implementation of Mitigation Strategies for Communities with Local COVID-19 Transmission: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/community-mitigation.html>

CDC Activities and Initiatives Supporting the COVID-19 Response and the President’s Plan for Opening America Up Again: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/php/CDC-Activities-Initiatives-for-COVID-19-Response.pdf>

CDC Indicators for Dynamic School Decision-Making: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/indicators.html>

Resolve to Save Lives Fact Sheet (Draft):

When and How to Close due to COVID-19 Spread: https://preventepidemics.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COV020_WhenHowTightenFaucet_v3.pdf

<https://preventepidemics.org/covid19/resources/playbook/#Response-4-2>

COVID-Local Metrics for Phased Reopening (RAND): <https://covid-local.org/metrics/>

Virginia Phase Guidance for K12 Schools:

<https://www.governor.virginia.gov/media/governorviriniagov/governor-of-virginia/pdf/Final-Phase-Guidance-for-Virginia-Schools-6.9.20.pdf>

Forward Virginia Phase Guidelines for Business Sectors: <https://www.virginia.gov/coronavirus/forwardvirginia/>

Considerations for Implementing Community Mitigation Measures

GUIDELINES FOR INCREASING COMMUNITY TRANSMISSION

Low

- Limit social gatherings to <250
- Entertainment venues open at 50% capacity or 1000 persons
- Gyms open at 75% capacity
- Bars/restaurants open with social distancing guidelines

Moderate

- Limit social gatherings to <50
- Low-contact entertainment venues open at 50% capacity; high-contact venues are closed
- Limit gyms to 30% capacity
- Bar/restaurants limited to 50% capacity
- Non-essential retail open at 50% capacity

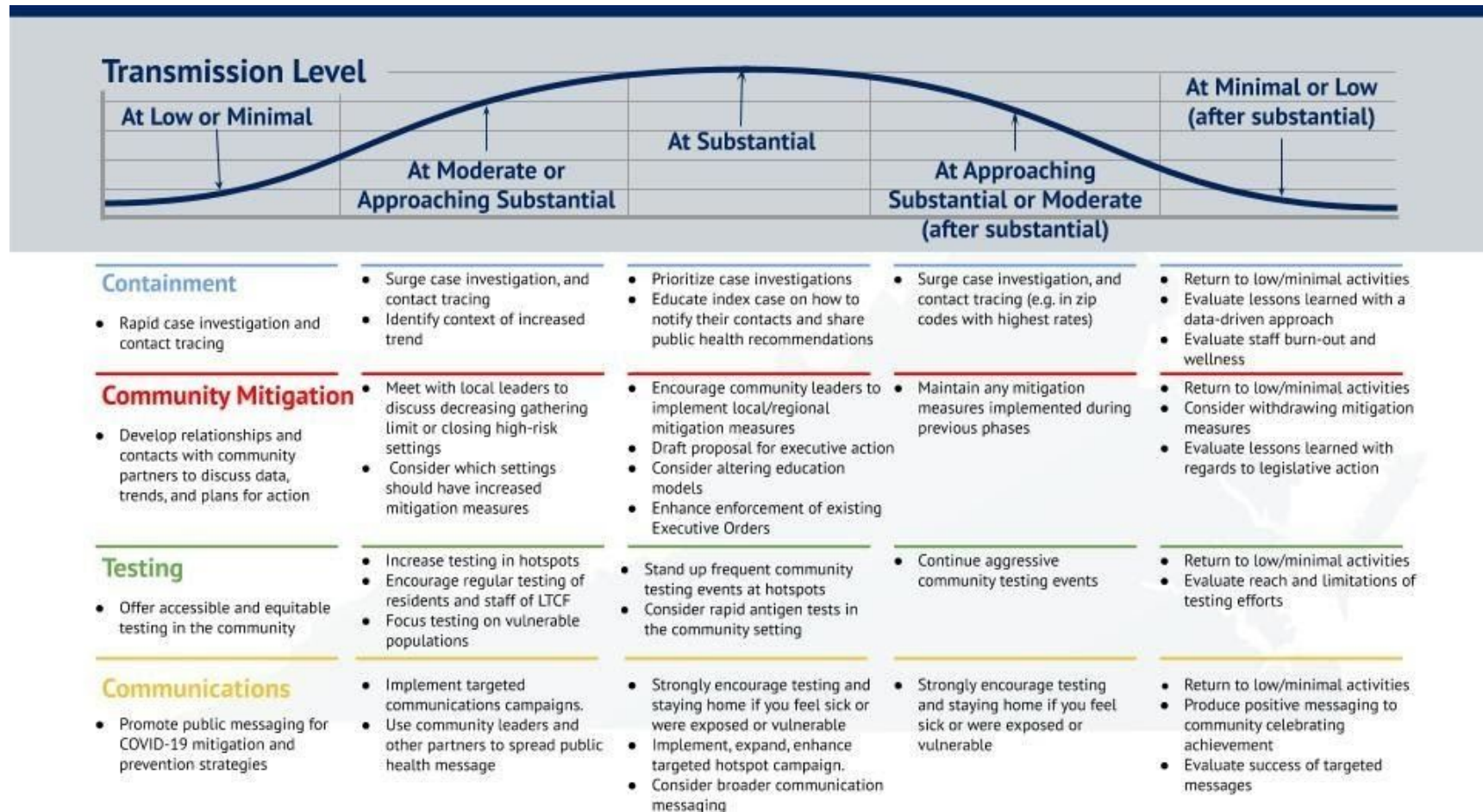
Substantial

- Limit social gatherings to <10
- Entertainment venues are closed
- Limit gyms to outdoor only
- Limit bars/restaurants to outdoor only with 50% capacity
- Non-essential retail open at 50% capacity

Using cloth face coverings in public indoor spaces, following physical distancing and enhanced hygiene practices, and encouraging telework are recommended at all levels of community transmission.

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


Attachment 2: Summary of Coordinated Response for Changes in Level of Community Transmission



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Attachment 3: Forward Virginia Phase Summary

Forward Virginia Phase Summary

	PHASE ONE	PHASE TWO	PHASE THREE
NON-ESSENTIAL RETAIL	 Open with 50% capacity	 Open with 50% capacity	 Open
RESTAURANTS AND BEVERAGE SERVICES	 Outdoor only with 50% capacity	 Open with 50% capacity	 Open
ENTERTAINMENT VENUES	 Closed	 low-contact venues open; high-contact venues closed	 Open with 50% capacity
FITNESS AND EXERCISE	 Outdoor only; 10-person limit	 Open with 30% capacity	 Open with 75% capacity
BEACHES	 Closed, except Virginia Beach	 Open	 Open
GATHERINGS	 10-person limit	 50-person limit	 250-person limit
TELEWORKING	Strongly Encouraged	Strongly encouraged	Strongly encouraged
FACE COVERINGS	Required	Required	Required
CHILDCARE	 Open for working families	 Open	 Open
PERSONAL GROOMING	 Apointment only	 Appointment only	 Open
CAMPGROUNDS	 Open; 10-person gathering limit	 Open	 Open
OVERNIGHT CAMPS	 Closed	 Closed	 Closed
STATE PARKS	 Open	 Open	 Open